

After first trying to promote white businessmen as candidates in the days before the meeting, Russell came to a compromise with Sprunt: some Democratic candidates were withdrawn and replaced with others less offensive to the Republican Party in return for a deletion of the Republican slate.²⁸ Russell then prevented a Republican ticket after calling French to Raleigh to explain the compromise.²⁹

view of the approaching election which threatens to provoke a war between the white and black races. We have frequently observed during political campaigns in the past, a degree of hostility which, at times, appeared to threaten the public peace but which passed off when wiser counsel prevailed; but the present state of excitement is apparently and really beyond bounds and we declare to your our conviction that we are on the brink of a revolution which can only be averted by the suppression of a republican ticket. The white people, and tax payers generally, protest that they have been driven to desperation, and we have no hesitation in saying that, even the unusual indiscretion of political partisans on the next election day, will precipitate a conflict which may cost hundreds, and perhaps thousands of lives and the partial or entire destruction of the city. We therefore on behalf of the conservative business firms of Wilmington deeply interested in the peace and welfare of our community, entreat you as the representative of the republican party here, to meet the emergency and avert a calamity by the means which we have indicated or by some other personal or political sacrifice which would be gratefully recognized and approved by our conservative and patriotic people who look to you in this extremity.” James Sprunt to Governor Russell, October 24, 1898, Alexander Sprunt and Son, Inc. Papers, Duke University Library, Durham. This letter was also reprinted in the October 28, 1898 issue of the *Wilmington Messenger*.

²⁸ Some of the white businessmen named as potential candidates for the Republican slate were openly against running for office during the election, particularly Benjamin Keith and D. L. Gore. McDuffie, “Politics in Wilmington,” 641-643; *Morning Star*, (Wilmington), October 28, 1898; *Charlotte Daily Observer*, November 2, 1898.

²⁹ An unsigned note in James Sprunt’s papers at Duke University provides insight: “For the Republican Party of New Hanover County to make no nominations for County Commissioners, Sheriff, Register of Deeds, Treasurer, Coroner, Clerk of

French returned to Wilmington just before the Republican convention on October 29 at the courthouse where county Republicans reluctantly complied.³⁰ The last African American candidate, incumbent Register of Deeds Charles Norwood, announced on November 3 that he would not run for reelection. Norwood stated in the paper that because “it was evident to him that a race war was being stirred up,” he wanted to “take no part in any such proceedings” and, as such, “he thought it advisable to withdraw.”³¹

The compromise was tenuous and local Republicans were unhappy with Democratic Party machinations.³² Flavel

Superior Court or Members of the House of Representatives, provided the Dem Party shall support for the house of Representatives any two of the following named gentlemen as representatives of the business interests of the City and County: E. S. Martin, D. L. Fore, Martin Willard, George Rountree, Henry McQueen, William Gilchrist, Roger Moore, R. W. Hicks, Frank McNeil, Junius Davis, J. C. Stevenson, Oscar Pearsall, Sam. Bear, Jr., S. P. McNair, C. W. Yates, J. W. Atkinson. These concessions to be upon the basis that such action will bring about a better state of feeling and result in a peaceable and orderly election for County State Senatorial and Congressional offices, without interference with the rights of lawful voters.” Russell’s bargaining removed from the slate several Democrats, including Joseph Carr and George Peschau, who would have pushed for his impeachment had they been elected to the legislature. Alexander Sprunt and Son, Inc. Papers, Duke University Library, Durham; *Contested Election Case*, 255; McDuffie, “Politics in Wilmington,” 642.

³⁰ Despite last minute machinations by white Republicans, resistant black leaders urged others to go to the polls “prepared to fight” for their right to vote. McDuffie, “Politics in Wilmington,” 623.

³¹ *Wilmington Messenger*, November 4, 1898.

³² Local Democrats were encouraged by the compromise and took note of the capitulation in their letters and diaries. Peter Mallett recorded in his daily journal that the “Republicans accede to demands of the Citizens.” Despite Russell’s compromise in order to maintain peace, about a week before the election Democrats in the city became more “emboldened and violent.” *Contested Election Case*, 36-7; Rountree,